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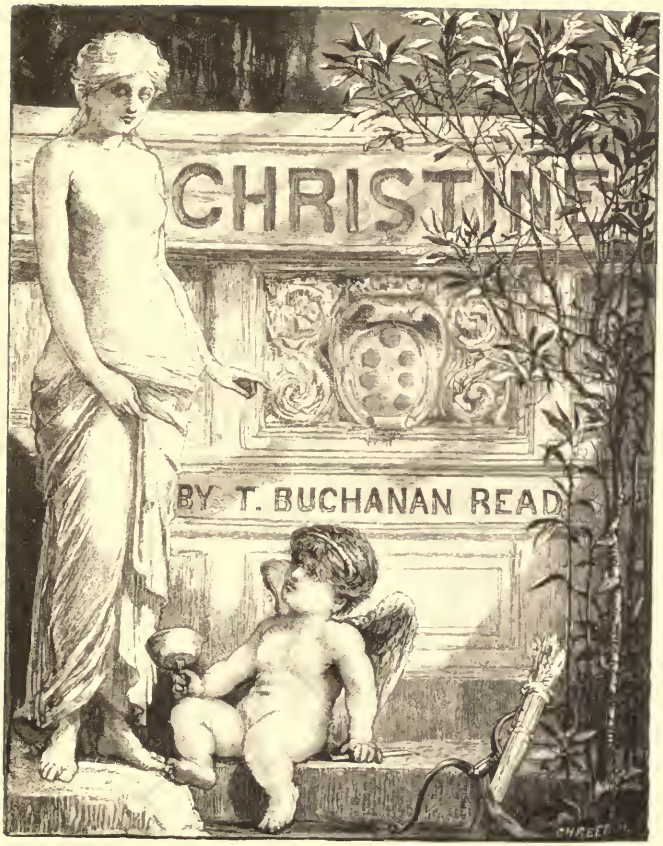
CHRISTINE
BY T. BUCHANAN READ

CHRISTINE.

Supposed to be related by a young sculptor on the hill-side between Florence and Fiesolé

CHRISTINE.

BY

T. BUCHANAN READ

ILLUSTRATED

FROM DESIGNS BY FREDERICK DIELMAN.

PHILADELPHIA:

J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

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1884.

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LIPPINCOTT'S
PRESS.

COME, my friend, and in the silence and the shadow wrapt apart, I will loose the golden claspings of this sacred tome—the heart.

By the bole of yonder cedar, under branches
spread like eaves,
We will sit where wavering sunshine weaves
romance among the leaves.

There by gentle airs of story shall our dreamy
minds be swayed,
And our spirits hang vibrating like the sunshine
with the shade.

Thou shalt sit, and leaning o'er me, calmly look
into my heart,
Look as Fiesolé above us looketh on Val d'Arno's
mart:—

Shalt behold how
Love's fair river
down the golden city goes,
As the silent stream of Arno through the streets
of Florence flows.

I was standing o'er the marble, in the twilight
falling gray,
All my hopes and all my courage waning from
me like the day:

There I leaned across the statue, heaving many
a sigh and groan,
For I deemed the world as heartless, aye, as
heartless as the stone!

Nay, I wellnigh thought the marble was a portion
of my pain,
For it seemed a frozen sorrow just without my
burning brain.

Then a cold and deathlike stupor slowly crept
along my frame,
While my life seemed passing outward, like a
pale reluctant flame.

And my weary soul went from me, and it walked
the world alone,
O'er a wide and brazen
desert, in a hot and
brazen zone;

There it walked and trailed its pinions, slowly
trailed them in the sands,
With its hopeless eyes fixed blindly, with its
hopeless folded hands.

And there came no morn,—no evening with its
gentle stars and moon,
But the sun amid the heavens made a broad
unbroken noon.

And anon far reaching westward, with its weight
of burning air,
Lay an old and desolate ocean with a dead and
glassy stare.

There my spirit wandered gazing, for the goal
no time might reach,
With its weary feet unsandalled on the hard and
heated beach.

This it is to feel uncared for, like a useless
wayside stone,
This it is to walk in spirit through the desolate
world alone!

Still I leaned across the marble, and a hand was
on my arm,
And my soul came back unto me as 'twere
summoned by a charm:

While a voice in gentlest whisper, breathed my
name into my ear,
"Ah, Andrea, why this silence, why this shadow
and this tear?"

Then I felt that I had wronged her, though I
knew it not before;
I had feared that she would scorn me if I told
the love I bore.

I had seen her, spoken to her, only twice or
thrice perchance;
And her mien was fine and stately, and all heaven
was in her glance.

She had praised my humble labors, the conception
and the art,—
She had said a thing of beauty nestled ever to
her heart.

And I thought one pleasant morning when our
eyes together met,
That her orbs in dewy splendor dropt beneath
their fringe of jet.

Though her form and
air were noble, yet a
simple dress she wore,
Like yon maiden by the
cypress, which the vines
are weeping o'er.

And she came
all unattended,—
her protection
in her mien;
And with somewhat of
reluctance bade me
call her name Christine.

Then that name became a music, and my dreams
went to the time,
And my brain all day made verses, and her
beauty filled the rhyme.

Never dreamed I that she loved me, but I felt
it now the more;
For her hand was laid upon me, and her eyes
were brimming o'er.

Oh, she looked into my spirit, as the stars look
in the stream,
Or as azure eyes of angels calm the trouble of
a dream.

Then I told my love unto her, and her sighs
came deep and long—
So you peasant plays the measure, while the
other leads the song.

Then with tender words we parted, only as true
lovers can;
I for that deep love she bore me was a braver,
better man.

I had lived unloved of any, only loving Art
before;
Now I thought all things did love me, and I
loved all things the more.

I had lived accursed of Fortune, lived in penury
worse than pain;
But, when all the heaven was blackest, down it
showered in golden rain.

I was summoned to the palace, to the presence
of the Duke,
Feeling hopes arise within me that no grandeur
could rebuke.

Down he kindly came to meet me, but I thought
the golden throne
Upon which my love had raised me, was not
lower than his own.

Or a dreamy-lidded Psyché, with her Cupid on
her knee;
Or a flying fretted Daphne, taking refuge in the
tree.

But I will not dictate, Signior; I can trust your
taste and skill—
In the ancient armored chamber you may carve
me what you will."

Then I thanked him as he left me—and I walked
the armored hall—
Even I, so late neglected, walked within the
palace wall.

There were many suits of armor, some with
battered breasts and casques;
And I thought the ancestral phantoms smiled
upon me from their masks.

And my footsteps were elastic with an energy
divine—
Never in those breasts of iron beat a heart as
proud as mine!

There for days I walked the chamber with a
spirit all inflamed,
And I thought on all the subjects which the
generous Duke had named—

Thought of those, and thought of others, slowly
thought them o'er and o'er,
Till my stormy brain went throbbing like the
surf along the shore.

In despair I left the palace, sought my humble
room again,
And my gentle Christine met me, and she smiled
away my pain.

"Courage!" said she, and my courage leapt
within me as she spake,
And my soul was sworn to trial and to triumph
for her sake.

Who shall say that love is idle, or a weight
upon the mind?
Friend! the soul that dares to scorn it, hath in
idle dust reclined.

I returned, and in the chamber piled the shape-
less Adam-earth;
Piled it carelessly, not knowing to what form
it might give birth.

There I leaned, and dreamed, above it, till the
day went down the west,
And the darkness came unto me like an old
familiar guest.

But I started, for a rustle swept athwart the solemn gloom!

And with light, like morn's horizon, gleamed the far end of the room!

Then a heavy sea of curtain, in a tempest rolled away!

Blessed Virgin! how I trembled! but it was not with dismay.

And my eyes grew large and larger, as I looked with lips apart;

And my senses drank in beauty, till it drowned my happy heart.

There it stood, a living statue! with its loosened
locks of brown—
In an attitude angelic, with the folded hands
dropt down.

But I could not see the features, for a veil was
hanging there,
Yet so thin, that o'er the forehead I could trace
the shadowy hair.

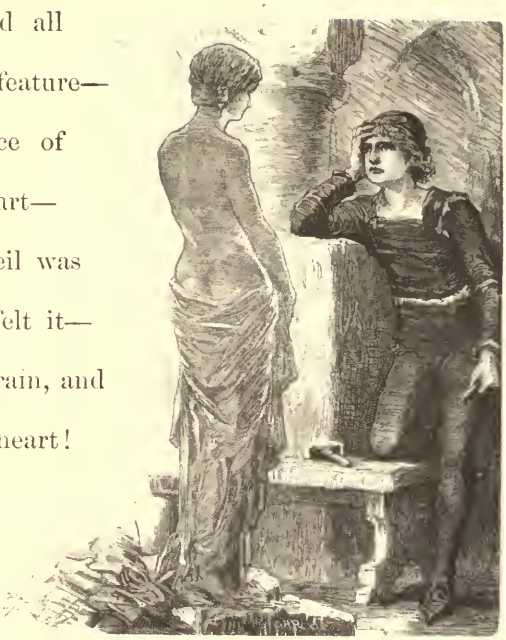
Then the veil became a trouble, and I wished
that it were gone,
And I spake, 't was but a whisper, "Let thy
features on me dawn!"

And the heavy sea of drapery stormed again
across my sight,
Leaving me appalled with wonder, breathless in
the sudden night.

But for days, where'er I turned me, still that
blessed form was there,
As one looketh to the sunlight, then beholds it
everywhere.

And for days and days I labored, with a soul
in courage mailed;
And I wrought the nameless statue; but, alas!
the face was veiled.

I had tried all forms of feature—every face of classic art—Still the veil was there—I felt it—in my brain, and in my heart!



Sorrowing, I left the palace, and again I met Christine, And she trembled as I told her of the vision I had seen.

And she sighed, "Ah, dear Andrea," while she
clung unto my breast,
"What if this should prove a phantom, some-
thing fearful and unblest—

Something which shall pass between us?" and
she clasped me with her arm;
"Nay," I answered, "love, I'll test it with a
most angelic charm.

Let me gaze upon thy features, love, and fear
not for the rest;
They shall exorcise the spirit if it be a thing
unblest!"

Then I hurried to the statue, where so often I had failed,
And I made the face of Christine, and it stood no longer veiled!

With a flush upon my forehead, then I called the Duke—he came,
And in rustling silks beside him walked his tall and stately dame;

And they looked upon the statue—then on me with stern surprise:
Then they looked upon each other with a wonder in their eyes!

"What is this?" spake out the Duchess, with
her gaze fixed on the Duke;
"What is this?" and me he questioned in a
tone of sharp rebuke.

Like a miserable echo, I the question asked
again—
And he said, "It is our daughter! your presump-
tion for your pain!"

But asudden from the curtain, in her jewelled
dress complete,
Swept a maiden in her beauty, and she dropped
before his feet—

And she cried, "O! father—mother, cast aside
that frowning mien;
And forgive my own Andrea, and forgive your
child Christine!

O! forgive us: for, believe me, all the fault was
mine alone!"
And they granted her petition, and they blessed
us as their own.

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